DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 452 153 SP 039 883

AUTHOR	Walker, Nancy T.; MacGillivray, Laurie; Aguilar, Jill A.
TITLE	Negotiating Higher Education: Latina Teachers' Memories of Striving for Success. CIERA Report.
INSTITUTION	Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, Ann Arbor, MI.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	CIERA-R-3-010
PUB DATE	2001-01-15
NOTE	23p.
CONTRACT	R305R70004
AVAILABLE FROM	Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, University of Michigan School of Education, 610 East University Avenue, Room 1600 SEB, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259. Tel: 734-647-6940; Fax: 734-763-1229; e-mail: ciera@umich.edu; Web site: http://www.ciera.org.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	College Applicants; College Bound Students; *Cultural Influences; Elementary Secondary Education; Ethnic Bias; Females; Higher Education; *Hispanic Americans; Preservice Teacher Education; Sex Bias; Teacher Attitudes; Teachers; Women Faculty
IDENTIFIERS	*Hispanic American Teachers; *Latinas

ABSTRACT

Thirteen Latina teachers were interviewed regarding their memories of and experiences with getting into college and getting degrees in education. Data came from the second phase of a 2-year study. In the first phase, researchers examined teachers' early childhood reading experiences. This study used individual interviews and focus groups to explore how respondents decided to go to college, the reaction of family and peers, sources of encouragement, barriers, the application process, and academic and social situations. Results indicated that respondents often encountered rigid gender, ethnic, and cultural expectations in their quest for higher education as well as a lack of institutional support in their university settings. They received support in overcoming challenges from high school instructors, home-school coordinators, college friends, family friends, and siblings. All respondents viewed college as critical to personal and professional success. Although respondents faced resistance from the university, they found support and friendship within the university's Latino culture. (Contains 29 references.) (SM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 452 153

Negotiating Higher Education

Latina Teachers' Memories of Striving for Success

Nancy T. Walker, Laurie MacGillivray, & Jill A. Aguilar
University of Southern California

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CIERA REPORT #3-010
January 15, 2001

CIERA
Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement

Negotiating Higher Education: Latina Teachers' Memories of Striving for Success

CIERA REPORT #3-010

Nancy T. Walker, Laurie MacGillivray, and Jill A. Aguilar
University of Southern California

CIERA Inquiry 3: Policy and Profession
What are the experiences of Latina teachers in higher education? How do personal experiences with reading in and out of school shape the teaching styles, strategies, and dispositions prospective and practicing Latina teachers bring to their teaching experiences?

In this report, Walker, MacGillivray, and Aguilar present an analysis of four interviews with Latina teachers who discuss their experiences getting into and through college. Walker and her colleagues show that Latinas often encounter rigid gender, ethnic, and cultural expectations in their quest for higher education, as well as a lack of institutional support in their university settings. The authors point out that if we hope to encourage academic success among this population—a population which is well-suited to working with beginning readers who are also English-language learners—we have to understand and systematically address these issues.

Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement
University of Michigan – Ann Arbor

January 15, 2001

University of Michigan School of Education

610 E University Ave., Rm 1600 SEB
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259

734.647.6940 voice
734.615.4858 fax
ciera@umich.edu

www.ciera.org

©2001 Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement.

This research was supported under the Educational Research and Development Centers Program, PR/Award Number R305R70004, as administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. However, the comments do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the National Institute of Student Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment or the National Institute on Early Childhood Development, or the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

Negotiating Higher Education: Latina Teachers' Memories of Striving for Success

Nancy T. Walker
Laurie MacGillivray
Jill A. Aguilar
University of Southern California

Due to a number of problems, many Latinos are not doing well in the U.S. educational system. In 1994, the Latino high school completion rate averaged 55%, whereas Caucasian students completed high school at a rate of 82%. Latinos accounted for only 7.4% of all higher education students, and only 10% had completed four years of college (Carter & Wilson, 1996).

Our goal is to find ways to encourage academic success among Latinos. We explore this issue by examining Latina teachers' experiences in higher education. As the number of Spanish-speaking students continues to increase, there is a dearth of teachers prepared to instruct them. In *Improving Schooling for Minority Children: A Research Agenda*, August and Hakuta (1997) state that one research need is "to learn how to increase the number of teachers skilled in working with English-language learners" (p. 269). An obvious choice would be to draw upon the pool of native Spanish speakers to meet this need.

In order to increase the number of Latino men and women in professions such as teaching, an analysis of the power dynamics in institutions of higher education is important. The dominant discourse discourages attention to cultural differences. But this is problematic, as Perez (1994) explains:

> Proceeding from communities that historically have been and continue to be multiply oppressed and disempowered, minorities cannot transcend or effectively ignore dominant discourse of identity; nonetheless, we can practice an oppositional, tactical politics of identity aimed at eventually constructing a new discourse of multiple, mobile and unhierarchized identities. (p. 269)

Perez encourages addressing cultural assumptions and reorienting dominant discourse. The ways that members of an oppressed group interact with class, ethnicity, and gender stereotypes have repercussions for their personal

and career paths. Power dynamics and the potential of resistance cannot be minimized.

This paper draws on data collected as part of a two-year study examining the relationship between lifelong school and literacy experiences and classroom reading instruction. In this paper, we specifically address two guiding research questions: (a) What were the experiences of Latina teachers in higher education? and (b) What support or resistance to the pursuit of higher education do Latina teachers remember encountering from family, friends, and school-related personnel? We strongly believe that Latinas need to be viewed in all their rich diversity and not as a monolithic group.

Key Literature

Compelling research in two areas is particularly relevant to this discussion: family support for college among Latinos, and Latino experiences in higher education. In terms of family support for college, research has linked Latino parents' aspirations for their children's educational future with their children's actual academic achievement. In a seminal work, Reese, Gallimore, Goldenberg, and Balzano (1995) conducted case studies of 32 Latino immigrant families in a longitudinal study of young children's literacy development. Contrary to stereotypes, these parents both valued and acted from a "future orientation." Academic and moral orientations were intertwined. Academic practices (e.g., helping with homework) were done for moral reasons, and moral orientations (e.g., good manners) promoted school success. Reese et al.'s study represents an important step toward rejecting myths and understanding the realities of this rarely studied group. Similarly, Arellano and Padilla (1996) found that having supportive parents was one factor that mediated school success.

Research has documented the differences that exist between the dominant school beliefs about success and those held by Latino families (Carger, 1996; MacGillivray, 1997; Valdes, 1996). Researchers have utilized focus groups and interviews to capture these differences (Orellana, Monkman, & MacGillivray, 1998; Fine & Weis, 1998). Carger (1996) and Valdes (1996) state that schools contribute to these differences by not building on children's cultural background. Orellana, Monkman, and MacGillivray's (1998) research provides contrasting views of schools and parents.

Gandara (1982) used a 117 item interview protocol on 45 Mexican Americans, 17 of whom were women, in order to isolate factors that contribute to higher educational achievement. She found that mothers played a significant role in fostering educational drive, and both parents were influential in their children's educational aspirations.

We also examined studies that addressed Latinos' experiences in higher education. In a survey of 357 Chicana undergraduates, Gloria (1997) found that these women's perceptions of the university environment were significantly correlated with the support they received from family and friends. This indicates that students who had positive interactions with the university also enjoyed higher levels of support from family and friends.

Research has also been conducted on the function of role models in both attending and being successful in college. For example, Cardoza (1991) conducted longitudinal surveys of 1,252 female Hispanic students on factors that influenced college attendance and found that positive role models provide support and encouragement to apply to and finish college. Besides role models, educational aspiration also was a predictor of attendance. As in Reese at al. (1995), Hispanic parents were documented as having aspirations for their children to attend college. Attinasi (1989) conducted open-ended interviews with 10 students about their perceptions of university attendance and the implications for freshman year persistence. He found that high school teachers and siblings influenced students' decisions to pursue college.

In order to further our knowledge of successful Latina students' experiences in higher education, we have chosen to extend Gloria's (1997) and Cardoza's (1991) quantitative research by utilizing in-depth interviews with Latina teachers. Since previous studies offer more global findings, we chose to share our data through short vignettes of a few of our participants.

Conceptual Framework

Two key views frame our research. First, we draw from the sociocultural valuing of context. Moll writes:

> As human beings we live in a world of social things, not only small and specific artifacts, tools, and symbol systems, or the social contexts created by others with whom we interact, but big, national and global social things, ideological and economic systems that shape, often in mysterious ways, our circumstances of life. (Moll, 1998, p. 61)

Discourse is shaped by the context in which it occurs. The academy has a long and exclusionary history, often refusing access to women and people of color (hooks, 1989; Pagano, 1990). Unfortunately, these barriers come in many guises including admittance based on a standardized test score; high tuition; a Eurocentric curriculum and communication patterns; little or no academic support; insensitivity to class inequities; racism; sexism; and homophobia.

Second, working from a feminist perspective, we place women at the center, as subjects of inquiry and as active agents in the gathering of knowledge (Stacey & Thorne, 1985). Most feminists are increasingly aware that gender, race, class, and sexual orientation—not gender alone—determine the allocation of power and the nature of any individual's identity, status, and circumstance (Collins, 1986; hooks, 1989; Hurtado, 1989; Pesquera & Segura, 1993). Collins (1986) talks about a commitment by White middle-class feminists to learn from the work of women of color and lesbian scholars, whose outsider-within (i.e., gaining knowledge of a dominant group without necessarily gaining power) status has already challenged and enriched social scientific discourse. We paid particular attention to cultural stereotypes and naiveté, especially since two of the three researchers are White.

The Researchers' Experience

As researchers, teachers, and women, we are uncomfortable with the inability of the format of a traditional article to capture the richness of our participants' lives. Who we are in interviews and analysis influences the data that "emerges." Thus we attempt to *name* ourselves to offer readers a glimpse at some aspects of the pivotal issues—language, social class, gender expectations, family obligations, and schooling—critical in negotiating higher education.

Nancy approaches this study as a European-American, middle-class graduate student in education. She is currently pursuing a doctorate in teacher education and literacy. She taught junior high for eight years. Laurie is a White associate professor in a school of education. She taught elementary school in Texas and is struggling to learn Spanish. Laurie went to college in her home state, unlike her older siblings who attended schools several states away. Jill is a biracial Chicana and White doctoral student in language and literacy. She taught middle school and high school for twelve years. Her biggest challenge in college was coming out as a lesbian.

Data Collection

Participants

The thirteen teachers in this study were participants in an earlier research project and were asked to volunteer for this study. All consider themselves Latina and bilingual but their lived reality of those labels varies greatly. Some are first generation immigrants, some have gone to school in the U.S. all their lives, some were encouraged to speak English at home, some are surrounded by extended family, some had mothers who did not work, some were discouraged from going to college, and some of their families had less money than others. Most of our teachers were born in California, although some were born in El Salvador and Mexico. The complexity represented by our sample is a mere sliver of the richness of the Latina community in the U.S. today.

Method

This paper focuses on data from the second phase of a two year study. In the first phase, we examined Latinas' early childhood reading experiences using focus groups and interviews. We began with individual interviews followed by focus groups and explored how participants decided to go to college, the reaction of family and peers, sources of encouragement and barriers, the application process, and finally academic and social situations.

After individual interviews were completed, a focus group was held to continue the discussion. During this time we checked, expanded upon, and validated comments from the interviews. The Latinas often nodded and extended each other's comments. The focus group, we hope, encouraged teachers to build a sense of community and share experiences. The sessions were audiotaped and transcribed. At the same time, we wrote field notes detailing dialogue, body movements, and facial expressions exhibited by the teachers. We mirrored back summaries of the teachers' responses, and they were asked to respond to them for validity and integrity. They affirmed the appropriateness of our summaries.

Method of Analysis

Nancy transcribed four of the audiotaped interviews and the field notes, which led to an initial stage of coding. In the process of transcribing, Nancy realized that the data generated by the teachers was not answering our research question on the literacy experiences of Latina teachers in higher education. She began to see a new, logical prior question—how these teachers negotiated their higher education experience in the first place. (Later we noticed the tendency by Laurie and Nancy to overlook the barriers to higher education—barriers that were almost nonexistent for the two of them.)

The three of us began coding the rest of the interviews and focus group following the guidelines by Strauss and Corbin (1990) for developing a grounded theory. We created a list of codes after reading the data. For example, revising the coding sheet several times generated five categories: gender, culture, school, peers, and family. We applied this coding sheet to the four transcribed interviews, one focus group, and the field notes for selective coding. Laurie and Jill began analyzing the other interviews. Nancy chose quotes and notes from the field notes, interviews, and focus group and attached them to colored paper representing the five categories. The three of us met together and compared data from all of the interviews and focus groups with the data from the initial analyses that Nancy had done on the four cases. They proved to be representative of the experiences of the larger group. We wrote the stories of these four women with the data from all the participants in mind. We chose them because of their diverse experiences with family, friends, and higher education.

The final step in our analysis included meeting with a group of highly experienced (each more than 20 years) Latina educators. All of them are in the process of getting their doctorates and are knowledgeable about research on Latinas in education. We reviewed our findings with them and refined our analysis based on their feedback. These educators confirmed the difficulties Latinas experience in obtaining an education.

Findings: Four Stories

In order to reflect the voices of the participants and offer insights into their various lived realities, we present four vignettes as exemplars of the 13 success stories of Latinas' navigating higher education.

Rosa

"This had to be the first step in order to better myself." Rosa's straight back rarely touched the plastic modeled chair during the interviews. Her tall, lean body appeared rigid, and she tended to speak in short, clipped sentences. The tension in her story revolves around her father. But her early desire to be a teacher and the intervention of a high school counselor also play a role in her obtaining a college degree.

Rosa is a twenty-six year old Latina, born in Mexico. She has taught for four years and plans to complete a doctorate in education. In high school, Rosa was "a good student" and worked hard to earn her grades. She wanted to go to college, but her father was very much against it. He expected her to stay home, marry, and have children. Her mother and siblings supported her desire for college, yet none challenged the head of the family. Her mother did eventually, but only when an outside force intervened. Both familial and cultural expectations ran counter to Rosa's goals to become college-educated and financially independent.

As Rosa explained, she was fortunate to meet, during her senior year, a supportive high school coordinator who was willing to talk with her father directly. The intervention of this school coordinator was critical in Rosa's journey to college. A White female, she visited the house in an attempt to persuade the father to support Rosa's dreams. Rosa recounts:

> I was not even present when the home-school coordinator and my father were speaking. I was in my room and my mom played an important part because she backed me up as well as the home-school coordinator. My Dad was just hard headed. "No! No! No! It doesn't matter what you tell me, she is not going." At that moment I was scared because I didn't know what was going to happen. I ended up coming [to school]. To this day I still keep in touch with her [the counselor]. She has always been there for me.

Yet there were consequences for Rosa as a disrupter of tradition. Her father took her to the university for orientation. He dropped her off with her belongings and left without even getting out of the car. Rosa recalled feeling lost. Other freshman were surrounded by family members, and she was on her own. With her head bowed down and her voice lowered, she recalled, "My father never visited me or picked me up or anything. I had to find my rides back home if I wanted to visit—all four years at the university." Although Rosa's mother and siblings supported her decision to attend college, none of them offered to provide Rosa transportation to visit home. One dramatic incident revealed her father's continuing anger. During the Los Angeles riots, while other students who had their own cars were able to

leave campus, Rosa was left alone in the dorm. Her father refused to come pick her up; no other family member would either.

So college was both a transition to living independently and an academic challenge. She explained:

> It was different. It was a hard transition. I was so used to my house. I had to be on my own now. I could not depend on my father or my mom. Adjusting the first couple of months was rough. I had a job now. I had to make sure all of my little bills were paid. I opened my first checking account.

Academics also felt foreign. Rosa summarized an experience in her English class:

> You had to read *Moby Dick* [Melville, 1857], Thoreau, and all these other people that I could never understand.... It was always hard for me to decode those books, whereas books talking about my culture I could understand.... Yet they were writing in a style that was new to me. It took me a lot longer to understand the meaning behind the paragraphs.

Texts containing Latino culture she found much easier to read; unfortunately, these were uncommon.

Rosa shared how fortunate she felt when she met people in college with common goals. Her friends were mostly Latinas who had chosen similar career paths. They reminded her of a family helping each other out. She has remained friends with many of them. On the other hand, Rosa remembered the resistance she encountered with her boyfriend:

> I didn't start dating until my sophomore year. At first he was kind of slowing me down. He wanted too much attention and I had other things to do. He didn't understand because he wasn't going to college. He stopped at high school. He didn't see anything beyond that. And I was like, how could you not see anything beyond that? I had to move on.

After this experience, Rosa concentrated on her studies and rarely dated. She said that she focused on earning a degree and becoming a teacher.

It is interesting to note that, now that Rosa is a teacher, she lives at home and supports the family financially. She shared, "I have a career, yet I'm still tied to my family a great deal. I have to support my family monetarily and emotionally." Her father never asks about her job, yet Rosa says that time is slowly healing the wounds caused by their conflicts.

Maria

Maria, a prim, petite woman, frequently spoke of God and her family during the interviews. Her parents told their children to "study hard, you don't want to end up like us working in a factory." Maria's older brothers and sisters set the standard of success as college graduates. She elaborated, "I knew I was going to college because I had all these older siblings. They were my role

models.... So I just knew. I had the value that my parents had instilled in me from education and I also saw that value in the action with my siblings." Maria is twenty-five years old and was born in the United States. She attended college in Los Angeles, where she has taught for three years, and she wants to continue teaching.

Maria's mother cleaned house for an attorney and his wife. The couple became friends of the family. They encouraged Maria's oldest sister to attend law school, and the husband set up an internship for her in his office. They also took the family to gatherings that Maria felt offered important cultural experiences. During the focus group discussion, she also shared that "they [the attorney and his wife] were behind me all the way. I was the youngest of the children and everyone was supporting me, all of my siblings. They were the ones who had gone to college."

At the beginning of her college career, Maria's brother reached out to support her. "He knew it was going to be my first day. I was all alone. I didn't have like other of my girlfriends from high school going there.... So he took the day off and took me from class to class.

"The university," Maria remembered, "was a big change because I came from such a small all-girls' school." But she did not remember any unusual experiences involving cultural differences. She talked about meeting new people in college:

> I didn't see the Anglo and the Asian, I just saw another human being who was different from me.... I have to confess I never think of myself as to what I am. For me I was just another girl going to Smith. I never thought, 'I'm a Hispanic person going to Smith.'

Yet at another point she explained the adjustment to co-ed classes:

> I have to confess that the ambience of the classes [at my all-girls school was] more relaxed. You felt a little bit more comfortable discussing certain things as opposed to if you were in a class where normally in my general studies classes sometimes I would be afraid because I knew there were guys there and I was used to being around girls at my schools. It doesn't mean I didn't say anything; it just took a little bit more time for me to say something.

Overall, Maria had a successful college experience aided by strong family support and personal drive. In response to a question about her success (Maria was valedictorian of her teacher education program and spoke at the School of Education commencement ceremonies), she responded, "Well, I did well. I can't complain. I did very well. God helped me a lot; that's all I can say."

Livia

During high school, Livia decided she wanted to go to college. Upon sharing this with her mother, she was told, "We couldn't afford that. Maybe you could go to a trade school and learn how to type and be a secretary. They get paid good." Livia did not have family members who attended college;

therefore, her family was unaware of opportunities that existed for students who wanted to attend college. Livia shared, "My reason to go was that I wanted to do something with myself." Livia is twenty-five years old and was born in El Salvador. She has taught for three years but hopes to return to school and pursue a degree in engineering.

Livia had lost her father due to illness and had a difficult relationship with her stepfather, so she was anxious to leave home. She was fortunate to have a teacher in her high school help with the entrance exams and the application. This teacher inspired her to pursue higher education—engineering specifically—and helped her to believe in herself:

> This instructor—his name was Mr. Sanchez—another girlfriend of mine, and myself became really good friends. He made it a point to guide us through the whole thing because I myself was not going to college because my family is financially, I mean we could not afford it.... He paid for applications to the university and saw me accepted into the engineering program.

As Livia's mother learned more about financial aid, she became more supportive. Livia was accepted to a large private school and moved into a dorm.

Livia felt few connections to the student population and curriculum at that university. In El Salvador, Livia's family was quite wealthy. When her family settled in the United States, however, their lifestyle changed dramatically due to lack of work. Livia acknowledged her class difference as she explained her challenges dealing with the dominant culture:

> They talked about life experiences that I didn't understand. Experiences that I never had. My family never traveled. We were always too poor to travel. I didn't understand. When they asked me to write on my travels, I would make it up. I felt out of place. It was not my language.

Livia also remembered the difficulty professors had with the pronunciation of her name. To her, this was yet another sign that she did not belong.

Luckily, the first year she lived on the "Latino floor." She felt at home there and had support from seven other girls who were Latina and understood where she was coming from. They had similar family backgrounds. Livia made the conscious decision to surround herself with female friends who provided her with emotional support.

During Livia's college career, her mother died due to malpractice. Livia began drinking heavily and doing poorly in classes. She was unable to concentrate in her engineering classes; the lectures were complicated and the classes were male dominated, so she explored other majors until she decided on education. Once in education classes, she found her focus and with the support of friends she stopped drinking.

Academically, she still struggled. She particularly had difficulty with reading:

> It wasn't a matter of me knowing how to read. It was focusing on understanding. I would start reading something and before I knew it my mind started wandering. It made no sense. When I did finish I

> remember reading words, not stories. I hated it. I felt like I was losing my mind.

Livia remembered her difficulties with comprehension. Looking at words that were meaningless, she would reread, ask her friends, or review vocabulary.

Eva

"I knew exactly what I wanted to do from the beginning," Eva remembered. "I knew I wanted to be a teacher and I went down that road." Eva is twenty-seven years old. She was born in the United States, educated in Los Angeles, and raised in a family that supported higher education. Her high school friends were college-oriented and "college was not an option but a fact." Eva believes the family was supportive of her goals partly because an older female cousin had entered college. The cousin dropped out when she got married, but she influenced Eva, who realized at an early age that she wanted to attend college and become a teacher. Eva remembered her cousin's story:

> She was so gifted. She still is. She's nineteen years my senior and I remember her going to school and I remember her growing up and I wanted to be just like her. And then she stopped going to school.

What struck Eva once she began college herself was how it opened up her world view:

> I know why they say [college is] the real world. You really start to understand the broader picture. Until you get there you are kind of isolated. Protected from things like that. I know that was my family. You start changing. You start seeing that. They [college] influence people's way of life and getting educated makes you think about things.

Eva realized that broader ideas and different opinions existed, which influenced her decisions about marriage, children, and a career. She continued:

> I went from thinking of having a family of four to five children to two at most. This whole change came over me. I started thinking about things more responsibly and realistically. I knew I wanted to be a teacher and finish college, and I also knew I wouldn't be wealthy.

Although Eva's parents supported her decision to marry in college, they also wanted her to earn a degree. At the same time, Eva felt pressure to start a family, but she knew that finishing college and becoming a teacher was a stronger desire. Eva lived at home while she attended "State," a junior college.

She laughed as she remembered the men in her classes. She recalled them "trying to hold onto the traditional macho role although they were supposed to be in college and open-minded and revolutionized." She added, "It still runs in our culture, this male machoness." Eva also discussed how her Chi-

cano Studies classes were male populated, and that even though these men were being educated they were trapped by roles that they had seen all their lives and couldn't break out of even if they tried.

The combination of machismo and a pro-Chicano identity were overpowering:

> At State it was such a Chicano-powered campus. It's everywhere. I couldn't help but get caught up in the whole thing. But I also realized that everything is bad to an extreme. And I realized at State they are very extreme. And I was thinking that was not necessarily me. Yes, I am proud of my heritage and who I am but I don't want to be so radical.

For Eva, having friends at her college with the same experiences and goals was important, but she opted for a less politically charged situation. Eva made the decision to leave this university after two years and transferred to Smith, where there was a limited Latino population. Eva shared, "I didn't speak to anyone. I didn't know anyone and everybody was White. I just thought, well, I'm here to get an education." She felt the differences on many levels:

> At State University [her first two years], the females were there to get an education and make a living for themselves. At Smith University, the females wanted to marry a Smith graduate. I never met anyone at State University like that and thought it was interesting. I do remember thinking it was strange because I was already married, but I guess that is just another thing you can get out of college.

Eva was interested in learning more about the dominant culture that surrounded her. She remembered being fascinated with the people she met. Eva talked about a girl who had never worked before in her life. Eva had been working since she was sixteen. In addition, Eva saw her family constantly through her college experience. The girl, on the other hand, had not seen her family in six months. Eva commented, "We were both intrigued by each others' differences."

Eva married her high school sweetheart during her freshman year of college. Both were going to school and working part time. During student teaching, she got pregnant. Just after her baby was born, she began teaching because a position came open where her friends worked. Her husband quit his job and went to school full time. Now, her husband works at the same school teaching fourth grade. Although Eva loves teaching, she has completed an administrative credential in order to become a principal.

Discussion

This study explores Latinas' memories of attending college and getting degrees in education. Our research on the dynamics of Latinas' processes of applying for and attending college supports previous work. These women were caught in a maze of tensions related to the overlapping issues of per-

sonal desires, gender expectations, familial and historical contexts, and cultural norms (Fine & Weis, 1998). As a result, they carried enormous burdens, responsibilities, and tensions while being caught "in a serious attempt to cope with and resolve contradicting messages regarding what they should do and be" (Anyon, 1984, p. 27). These were both internal and external struggles. All of our teachers were able to pursue a career by relying on an incredible amount of self-reliance, even when mentors or families supported the process. The barriers they encountered varied widely but often included rigid gender, ethnic, and cultural expectations.

Families, Boyfriends, and Mentors

None of the 13 participants turned away from their families, although the relationships varied considerably. Some visited their families every weekend, whereas Rosa and Livia had very little interaction with their families during their college years. Yet Rosa is close to her family now. The women have redefined what it means to be a Latina against gender, class, and cultural pressures and expectations.

We found, as did Fine and Weis (1998), that Latinas were involved in restructuring gender relationships. Marriage and children were cultural traditions expected of these women. Yet they wanted to pursue higher education. Postponing marriage and children is rare in the Latinas' culture, as is attending college. As a result of this decision, they shouldered the financial and emotional tensions of satisfying both familial and academic demands. Instead of postponing motherhood, two of our teachers made the decision to return to school while their children were still in diapers—an act frowned upon by many Latinos across contexts. These women were claiming previously unacceptable choices. Often these did not come easily (Genzuk & Baca, 1998) and increased their burdens.

The women had role models of varying sorts. High-school personnel were catalysts for some of the women. Most of these individuals were White and male, yet their influence and encouragement played a pivotal role in these women's decisions to pursue college. This shows that even adults who do not share culture, gender, or class with minority students can serve to improve those students' chances to continue their education. The mentors aided the Latinas in disrupting gender, familial, cultural, and institutional expectations by going before them and/or encouraging and helping them on the road to success at a university.

Many of the teachers moved away from strong, supportive family environments into the strange and unfamiliar territory at the university. Others lived at home but often felt excluded from collegiate social life. For these women, this was a time to become responsible and to make sound decisions that often ran counter to what was desired by the ones they loved.

The University as Institution

All of our teachers viewed college as critical to professional and personal success. Ironically, the university itself is often characterized as an oppressive institutional structure whose culture, according to Giroux (1983), is "related to the various cultures that make up the wider society in that it confirms the culture of the ruling class while disconfirming the cultures of other groups" (p. 268).

Although these teachers participated in the university setting at one level, in many ways they were excluded from a curriculum that was designed for mainstream society. Specifically, they encountered texts written by men and for men. Differences in class, gender expectations, and ethnicity were disadvantages for these teachers. In spite of their involvement, they remained "outsiders within" (Collins, 1986).

There were ways that the institution of college both helped and hindered the Latinas' success. The academic institutions our participants attended, like those that Collins (1998) studied, were "predicated upon their alleged inferiority and dedicated to their removal." Although many of the Latina teachers' experiences were representative of their "outsider-within" position, these teachers managed to negotiate the system. Maneuvering their way through the mazes of academia demanded much more from these teachers than their earlier educational experiences provided them.

These women entered an environment that was foreign to them. As a result, they struggled to adapt to the academic demands while adjusting to a population that was culturally intolerant and of a different socioeconomic status. Lack of money, connections, transportation, and travel experiences impacted these teachers' assimilation into the university environment. Additionally, they were competing in an environment that was designed for the male student to be productive in society. According to Lewis (1993):

> Given the social realities of work, employment, and remuneration, young women know that their ability to 'work their way' through university is economically a more difficult project for them than it is for men. Nor must it be forgotten that women's and men's education does not ultimately accrue them equal job opportunities and equal financial remuneration. (p. 85)

Besides university teaching style, curriculum had the potential to draw the Latinas in. They all enthusiastically shared stories about the courses they took that included content connected to their experiences. But these courses were rare. Collins (1998) admonishes that "curriculum includes the knowledge that most interests elite groups. Unfortunately, this public transcript far too often presents one version of the truth as being the only ideal and superior version" (p. xi).

Although these teachers faced resistance from many aspects of the university, they did find support and friendship within the university's Latino culture. Three of the participants had the opportunity to live on the Latino floor at their university. Despite theft and property destruction from unknown sources, the inhabitants on those floors felt like a "family." All three teachers

remembered the closeness with their floormates and the strong friendships they made.

Having even a small number of friends that shared cultural and often socio-economic backgrounds made the transition to college easier. It is interesting that although the university arranged this setting (a Latino residence floor), the support was peer-based. Simmel's (1950) assertion still holds true; these Latinas' positions in the university were determined, essentially, by the fact that they did not belong to it from the beginning (p. 402).

Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to provide a critical, qualitative investigation of Latinas' school experiences. Why are these Latina teachers's stories important? Because we need more teachers who are prepared to teach second language learners. This population we studied is an obvious choice, but to attract them into teaching careers and the college curricula that precede those careers, we must understand the struggles they encounter in higher education. These teachers "narrate a form of gender relations firmly embedded within rigid and relatively unchallenged assumptions of heterosexuality, machismo and 'traditional' formulations of family" (Fine & Weis, 1998, p. 213).

The knowledge of beneficial interactions suggests policy improvements for secondary and higher education. These Latinas received support from people who helped them overcome challenges. Aid came from many directions. Some mentioned high-school instructors or home-school coordinators who had encouraged them. Others spoke fondly about college friends, females in particular, who provided emotional support. Family friends or siblings also guided these teachers' to and through the maze of higher education. Even those from different classes, ethnicities, and genders were able to serve as enablers. Although mentors sharing a similar background might be more helpful, we must face today's realities: Middle-class White men still dominate academia, whereas middle-class White women dominate the schools. These men can play a role in supporting minorities. These Latinas' experiences suggest that some high-school personnel are successfully supporting college enrollment. Unfortunately, no aid, personal or academic, was voluntarily reported at the college level.

College courses' content and structure could be improved through developing our understanding of what engages/disengages students from nondominant backgrounds—in this case, Latinas. Texts which echo the Latinas experiences, class, gender, and culture might help, as would an interactive classroom structure.

This study points towards a few possible avenues for improving the pipeline of Latinos into college. First, high schools can actively educate parents about college and financial aid. Second, visiting parents at home can greatly influence them and their children. Third, more support for minorities and first generation college students is needed in high school and college. Awareness and sensitivity to the tensions that might surround college attendance could

ease difficult situations. Student visits to colleges and guest visits from professors can clarify expectations and typically tacit norms. Teacher educators can reexamine curricula and the design of their classes to promote a more dialogical, reflexive, and culturally relevant learning experience.

Although the Latinas we interviewed could easily be seen as "traditional" or relatively "conservative" in their gender and sexuality arrangements and judgments, it would be misleading to presume that they are unconflicted about the dance of power/gender/sexuality that unfolds in their homes and on their streets. Indeed, this generation of young women know all too well the torture of gendered role prescription (Fine & Weis, 1998, p. 217). It is critical that preservice teachers learn how to use their own backgrounds as vehicles rather than barriers for success. With a better understanding of culture, instructors in teacher education programs can help students become aware of their own previously tacit beliefs and illuminate the connection between their own literacy history and their teaching techniques.

Future research will address the relationship between Latina teachers' literacy experiences and beliefs about their current classroom practices. We will also examine how Latina teachers used their "outsider-within" position to navigate through the university setting.

Teacher education programs must recognize and react to changes in their student population. By centering this study on Latina educators, we make their experiences public knowledge while illuminating their struggles, their successes, and their insights into promoting success for K–12 and college second-language learners.

References

Anyon, J. (1984). Intersections of gender and class: Accommodation and resistance by working class and affluent females to contradictory sex role ideologies. *Journal of Education, 166,* 25-48.

Arellano, A., & Padilla, A. (1996). Academic invulnerability among a select group of Latino university students. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 18* (4), 485-507.

August, D., & Hakuta, K. (1997). *Improving schooling for language-minority children: A research agenda.* Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Attinasi, L. (1989). Getting in: Mexican Americans' perceptions of university attendance and the implications for freshman year persistence. *Journal of Higher Education, 60* (3), 247-276.

Cardoza, D. (1991). College attendance and persistence among Hispanic women: An examination of some contributing factors. *Sex Roles, 24,* 133-147.

Carger, C. L. (1996). *Of borders and dreams: A Mexican-American experience of urban education.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Carter, D. J., & Wilson, R. (1996). *Fourteenth annual report on minorities in higher education.* Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

Collins, P. H. (1986). Learning from the outsider within: The sociological significance of Black feminist thought. *Social Problems, 33* (6), S14-S32.

Collins, P. H. (1998). *Fighting words.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Fine, M., & Weis, L. (1998). *The unknown city.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Gandara, P. (1982). Passing through the eye of the needle: High-achieving Chicanas. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 4* (2), 167-179.

Genzuk, M., & Baca, M. (1998). The paraeducator-to-teacher pipeline. *Education and Urban Society, 31* (1), 73-88.

Giroux, H. (1983). Theories of reproduction and resistance in the new sociology of education: A critical analysis. *Harvard Educational Review, 53* (3), 257-293.

Gloria, A. (1997). Chicana academic persistence. *Education and Urban Society, 30* (1), 107-121.

Hooks, B. (1989). *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking Black.* Boston: South End Press.

Hurtado, A. (1989). Relating to privilege: Seduction and rejection in the subordination of white women and women of color. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 14,* 833-855.

Lewis, M. (1993). *Without a word: Teaching beyond women's silence.* New York: Routledge.

MacGillivray, L. (1997, December). *Parent beliefs.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Reading Conference, Scottsdale, AZ.

Melville, H. (1857). *Moby Dick.* New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Moll, L. C. (1998). Turning to the world: Bilingual schooling, literacy, and the cultural mediation of thinking. In T. Shanahan & F. Rodriguez-Brown (Eds.), *The 47th Yearbook of the National Reading Conference* pp. 59-75). Chicago: National Reading Conference, Inc.

Orellana, M. F., Monkman, K., & MacGillivray, L. (1998). *Parents and teachers talk about literacy and success.* Manuscript submitted for publication.

Pagano, J. (1990). *Exiles and communities: Teaching in the patriarchal wilderness.* New York: State University of New York Press.

Perez, L. E. (1994). Education of Chicana/os. In C. McCarthy and W. Chichlow (Eds.), *Race identity and representation in education* (pp. 268-279). New York: Routledge.

Pesquera, B. M., & Segura, D. A. (1993). There is no going back: Chicanas and feminism. In N. Alarcon et al. (Eds.), *Chicana critical issues* (pp. 95-115). Berkeley, CA: Third Women Press.

Reese, L., Gallimore, R., Goldenberg, C., & Balzano, S. (1995). Immigrant Latino parents' future orientations for their children. In R. Macias and R. Garia Ramos (Eds.), *Changing schools for changing students* (pp. 205-230). Santa Barbara, CA: Regents of the University of California.

Simmel, G. (1950). The stranger. In K. Wolff (Ed.), *The sociology of Georg Simmel* (pp. 402-408). New York: Free Press.

Stacey, J., & Thorne, B. (1985). The missing feminist revolution in sociology. *Social Problems, 32,* 301-316.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research.* Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.

Valdes, G. (1996). *Con respeto: Bridging the distances between culturally diverse families and schools.* New York: Teachers College Press.

About CIERA

The Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) is the national center for research on early reading and represents a consortium of educators in five universities (University of Michigan, University of Virginia, and Michigan State University with University of Southern California and University of Minnesota), teacher educators, teachers, publishers of texts, tests, and technology, professional organizations, and schools and school districts across the United States. CIERA is supported under the Educational Research and Development Centers Program, PR/Award Number R305R70004, as administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education.

Mission. CIERA's mission is to improve the reading achievement of America's children by generating and disseminating theoretical, empirical, and practical solutions to persistent problems in the learning and teaching of beginning reading.

CIERA Research Model

The model that underlies CIERA's efforts acknowledges many influences on children's reading acquisition. The multiple influences on children's early reading acquisition can be represented in three successive layers, each yielding an area of inquiry of the CIERA scope of work. These three areas of inquiry each present a set of persistent problems in the learning and teaching of beginning reading.

CIERA INQUIRY 1
Readers and Texts

Characteristics of readers and texts and their relationship to early reading achievement. What are the characteristics of readers and texts that have the greatest influence on early success in reading? How can children's existing knowledge and classroom environments enhance the factors that make for success?

CIERA INQUIRY 2
Home and School

Home and school effects on early reading achievement. How do the contexts of homes, communities, classrooms, and schools support high levels of reading achievement among primary-level children? How can these contexts be enhanced to ensure high levels of reading achievement for all children?

CIERA INQUIRY 3
Policy and Profession

Policy and professional effects on early reading achievement. How can new teachers be initiated into the profession and experienced teachers be provided with the knowledge and dispositions to teach young children to read well? How do policies at all levels support or detract from providing all children with access to high levels of reading instruction?

www.ciera.org

CIERA
Center for the Improvement of
Early Reading Achievement

CIERA is a collaboration of
University of Michigan
University of Virginia
Michigan State University

with
University of Minnesota
University of Southern California

University of Michigan School of Education
610 E University Av, Rm 1600 SEB
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259
734.647.6940 voice
734.763.1229 fax
ciera@umich.edu

www.ciera.org